In the Name of the Earth and the Lord

By Jonathan Olvera

Before I shaped the land, I had to shape myself.

They say labor is the burden of the lowly, the task of those beneath power. But I have found that in work—honest, unforced work—there is more peace than in command. There is more wisdom in the sweat of the brow than in the sharpness of a tongue.

To place one's hands in the soil is not to lower oneself, but to rise into something eternal. The earth remembers. The seeds remember. And perhaps the gods do too.

I have learned to be gentle—not as weakness, but as strength softened by choice. The harsh voices of authority once shaped me with fear, but I chose not to carry their anger. I listened to nature instead. I watched how she bends without breaking, how she gives even when stripped. She taught me patience. She taught me to serve without shame.

So I do not rebel against the order of things. I do not raise a sword against law. But I have chosen a different path—one that neither defies nor submits, but transforms.

My labor is not an offering to men. It is a conversation with the divine. In the quiet spaces between each breath, each motion of the hand, I speak my faith—not in words, but in work.

This is how I came to carve a path—not for conquest, but for understanding.

The time in his long-known home was pleasing to a new count—a count of heads. The village had grown, quietly at first, then quickly, like a field of grain catching wind. It was not often that a small settlement gave birth in such deliberate order, but order had become necessity. Life had begun to mimic design. Science, once myth and miracle, had grown into method. The labor of men, though hard, had become guided by thought, not just force. And nature—generous as ever—was not resisting. It was listening.

The time was named *Rome*. And the earth itself seemed to echo the name.

Paths had begun to stretch like veins from the heart of the settlement. Dirt pressed flat by the traffick of feet, hooves, carts. What began as simple tracks grew into roads, and roads into arteries of trade and travel. Distant lands proved similar truths: that grain fed power, and power longed for more.

“They look the same as I,” the young plebeian often thought as he watched new faces pass through the village. He saw strangers from the north, sun-darkened men from the south, women adorned in cloths dyed with distant color. A brotherhood of shape, even amid difference. He admired them—and sometimes feared them. The world was growing larger. And he was still standing in a small field.

There was much slavery, and with it, the weight of empire. Some served by force, others by hunger. But to the young man, something else stirred—a desire not to conquer, but to *cultivate*. He longed not to dominate nature, but to invite it into conversation. To give shape to chaos. The people consumed the land’s abundance, but he wanted to feed it in return.

The weather had been kind. Seasons predictable, rains generous. The pace of construction quickened—walls, aqueducts, temples. Trade brought tools, ideas, even gods. Practice became profession. The gods became stories—but not for him. His belief remained personal, burning like a quiet flame.

“I am excited,” he said to himself one morning, standing at the edge of a neglected plot of land just outside the village. Here, grass stood waist-high and tangled. A faint path ran through it—carved by deer, foxes, the occasional shepherd. It was not much, but it was something.

He knelt, fingers brushing the earth. “I have a need to control this here,” he whispered. “Not to possess—but to know it.”

He stood, inhaling deeply. “I can learn this.”

He looked down at the dirt. “Just look at the ground, and its untamed nature…” Then he smiled, embarrassed by his own voice. Still, he spoke again—louder this time.

“Would you like to work for me?”

He paused. The wind rustled the tall grass.

“I have a choice today. And the choice is in my faith. It is in my belief. I know I can learn and make plentiful for myself.”

He placed a hand over his chest. “In this service, my Lord, I know I can honor my word.”

The moment was not grand. No thunder rolled. No divine light split the sky. But something subtle shifted—a quiet certainty in his bones.

“I believe that you know me,” he said softly. “And you will allow me to do this work in your name.”

The next day, he began.

He borrowed tools—simple ones. A spade, a hoe, a rusty sickle. The first few days, he cleared the path, removing rocks and stubborn roots. Then he marked rows with twine. His hands bled. His back ached. But his spirit sang.

Each morning, he offered a brief prayer—not in temple, but in field. “Let my labor be good. Let my work become word.”

Others noticed. Some mocked him. “The gods don’t live in dirt,” an older man said, spitting near the path. Others were kinder. “You’re wasting good time, boy,” a woman chided. “Come build walls with us—we pay in coin.”

He nodded politely. But he stayed.

Seasons passed.

He planted flax and lentils. Then barley. Then wheat. The yield was small at first. But it grew. And with it, so did he.

He built a small shelter nearby—nothing more than woven reeds and wood. But it gave him rest. At night he listened to the wind and wrote in a small wax tablet, not with elegance but with honesty. He recorded the movement of stars, the flight of birds, the scent of soil before rain.

In time, children came to watch him. He showed them how seeds slept in soil, and how water coaxed them to wake. He taught them how to read the land—not just maps, but *meaning*.

One day, a traveler paused by his field. The man was clothed finely, a scholar from the city. He studied the rows and asked, “Is this your land?”

The young man nodded. “It is not mine in ownership. But it is mine in service.”

The scholar smiled. “You’ve shaped it well.”

“It shaped me first,” he replied.

The scholar stayed for hours, asking questions, taking notes. Before leaving, he offered a scroll of parchment.

“Your field is mentioned now, in the city’s record. They’re calling it *the student’s garden*. I hope you don’t mind.”

The young man blinked, unsure how to answer. “I never thought it would matter.”

“It matters,” the scholar said. “A great many things start in silence.”

As the man walked away, the plebeian turned back to the field. Wind passed through it like a whispered prayer. He closed his eyes.

He did not feel small anymore. The village was still there. So was the empire, the slaves, the distant wars. But he had carved a path—his own.

And in the soft soil beneath his feet, he had placed something lasting.

Not stone.
Not gold.
But faith.

Now I understand.

The strength of a man is not in how he commands others, nor in how he resists the will of the world, but in how he listens—deeply, patiently—to what life asks of him.

The path I carved did not lead to glory, but to grounding. The field did not shout my name to the heavens, but it answered me. In every root that took hold, in every sprout that braved the light, I saw a reflection of my own hope.

I once thought submission was defeat—but I see now, to bow to the rhythms of nature, to walk humbly in service of something greater, is to be free. Gentleness is not silence. It is strength without cruelty. It is power without the need to dominate.

The world will still build empires. Stone will still rise, and names will be etched into walls. But I will not need a statue to remember what I did here.

The soil remembers.
The wind remembers.
And I remember who I became.

I am no longer only a plebeian.
I am a keeper of quiet faith,
A servant of the living earth,
And a maker of peace in a world of commands.